



STATE OF TENNESSEE

Preschool in Tennessee TN Voluntary Pre-K, Head Start, Title I Pre-K, Community Pre-K & Child Care, and Special Education

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the entrance requirements for preschools in Tennessee?

Tennessee's Voluntary Pre-K – First priority for enrollment is all children who meet free or reduced price lunch income guidelines, and are four years old by September 30th. If space is available after enrolling children who qualify for free or reduced lunch, the program may enroll children who have disabilities, are English Language Learners, are in state custody, or who are at risk due to abuse or neglect, regardless of income. If space is still available after the first 20 days of the new school year, the LEA can submit a request to the Office of Early Learning to enroll all other children at that time.

Head Start – Head Start is a federal program for preschool children from low-income families, according to the poverty guidelines published by the federal government. Children who attend Head Start participate in a variety of age-appropriate educational activities, receive medical and dental care, have healthy meals and snacks, and enjoy playing indoors and outdoors in a safe setting. A minimum of ten percent (10%) of enrollment opportunities are offered to children with disabilities. Children in state custody or are homeless are given enrollment priority.

Title I Pre-K - Title I Pre-K programs generally serve Title I designated schools, and can serve any preschooler in the specific school zone, regardless of income. Check with your local school system for entrance requirements.

Community Child Care and Preschools – There are many different requirements for entrance into child care and preschool programs, depending upon the program. Contact your area Child Care Resource and Referral Center for more information. <http://www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/adfam/ccr&r-numbers.pdf>

Special Education – Children who are determined to have disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are eligible for services from birth through 21. Preschool children, generally children aged three through five, are eligible to receive a free appropriate public education on their third birthday. Services for children with disabilities are individually determined based on the needs of each child.

2. Do children with disabilities receive preference to attend Head Start, TN Voluntary Pre-K, or Title I Pre-K's?

Children with disabilities who otherwise meet the entrance requirements for any preschool program, can be considered for enrollment but do not receive preference in the enrollment process. Head Start is mandated by federal law to enroll at least 10% of their total enrollment numbers with children with disabilities.

3. Can an Individual Education Plan Team (IEP team) guarantee placement of a child with a disability into a particular preschool program?

Children with disabilities must meet entrance requirements for any program considered. An IEP cannot necessarily guarantee a placement into a particular program. Programs may be full, or have entrance requirements which have to be met. IEP teams should work with Pre-K representatives to discuss appropriate placement opportunities for children to receive special education services that may be appropriate for a particular child. A representative from that program may be included in the development of the IEP by providing information, or by attending the meeting. It is important that programs and agencies work together to ensure appropriate placements for all preschool children.

4. If a child lives in a Title I school zone with a Title 1 Pre-K classroom, does he have to meet income requirements to attend?

Title I Pre-K programs generally serve Title I designated schools, and can serve any preschooler in the specific school zone, regardless of income.

5. If my child is not ready for kindergarten can my child stay in Pre-K?

If a child is kindergarten age, then kindergarten must be the first consideration for placement for any children. Many children who may not seem ready for kindergarten do very well there. Some children may attend a transition classroom after kindergarten which offers more opportunities to learn before moving to the first grade. Children who are kindergarten age are not eligible for Title I Pre-K, Voluntary Pre-K, or Head Start, unless the child has an IEP that supports continued preschool placement.

6. What are the attendance requirements for Pre-kindergarten programs?

TN Voluntary Pre-K (VPK)- Pre-k enrollment is limited at this time due to funding. Because statute requires a minimum of 5.5 hours a day five days a week, funding is provided accordingly. Clearly, full-time enrollment is required for entry into this program. It was not meant to be a drop-in or part-time program. All children are enrolled on a full time basis only. Participation in the TN VPK is voluntary and parents may withdraw their child at any time. Excessive unexcused absences could result in dismissal from the program.

Head Start- Every Head Start Center strives for enrollment of children on a full time basis which is based on the hours of operation of the program. Excessive unexcused absences could result in dismissal from the program.

Community Child Care- Each child care program is required to take attendance. Each child care center establishes its own attendance criteria.

Special Education- An IEP identifies the services, the length of time, and where a child will receive these services.

7. Can children attend Tennessee's VPK program on a part-time or limited basis?

The Tennessee VPK program is required by state statute to operate 5 days a week with a minimum 5.5 hour day. Children are expected to attend every day. A child with disabilities can be enrolled full time in the VPK classroom and receive special education services on a part-time basis.

8. My first child was in a program, will my other children be able to attend?

All children must meet entrance requirements, even if they have siblings in certain programs. Check with your local program.

9. What will my child learn in pre-kindergarten?

All Tennessee VPK and Head Start programs provide learning environments that support development of the whole child across all developmental domains. These standards are listed in the Tennessee's Early Learning Developmental Standards, which can be viewed on line at: <http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/earlychildhood/>. These standards describe age appropriate developmental skills for children birth to age 5. Head Start also follows the Head Start National Performance Standards which can be viewed at: www.headstartinfo.org. Children with disabilities have Individual Education Plans which are developed to meet their unique needs, and are based on the early learning developmental standards.

10. What curricula are used in Pre-K?

Tennessee's VPK and Head Start programs choose a curriculum from a list of approved curricula that are research based, reliable, age-appropriate and aligned with the TN Early Learning Developmental Standards. The list of approved curricula for the TN VPK can be found at:

<http://www.tennessee.gov/education/prek/>. Other programs may make those decisions at the local level.

11. Is transportation provided to the preschool?

Transportation is provided by some programs, but not all. These are local decisions. In the case of a child with a disability, transportation may be provided as a related service. IEP teams make this determination, depending on the individual needs of the child.

12. How much time can my child spend on the bus?

Children in Tennessee can spend no more than 90 minutes on a bus either to school, or on the return trip home. Children with disabilities should spend time on a bus that is comparable to non-disabled peers.

13. If no transportation is available for my child are there other options?

Some programs may reimburse parents for transporting children, or for arranging for others to transport their children. Check with your local programs.

14. What do I do if my child is having difficulty in preschool?

First talk to the child's teacher. Remember, young children learn many different skills at different times. If the issue is not resolved, schedule a conference with the building level administrator, which might include the pre-k teacher and/or supervisor. If concerns persist, a referral to your local school for an evaluation of your child may be recommended. Call your local elementary school, or the special education department in the school system in which you live to make a referral.

15. How is discipline handled in preschool?

Behaviors that are interfering with a child's learning, or the learning of others need to be addressed. There are many ways to support children who have difficult behavior. Individual programs may have specific rules to address this issue. The preschool program and the family should work together to collect data to identify the cause of the behavior, and to develop a plan for changing the behavior.

Behavior plans should be developed on the principals of research based positive behavioral supports, with an understanding that negative behaviors must be replaced by appropriate positive behaviors. It is important to teach appropriate positive behaviors and to reinforce and reward the child for using those behaviors. Positive supports and consequences are determined on an individual basis. It is important for everyone to follow the agreed upon plan consistently for a period of time before evaluating the effectiveness of the plan, usually for two to three

weeks. Children's behaviors usually get worse instead of better right after a plan is put into place, as the child is often trying to "test" or get around the plan. Under certain circumstances the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and the implementation a behavior intervention plan (BIP). Any preschool child with a disability and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that addresses behavior must have that plan followed.

16. Can a child in preschool be dismissed because of inappropriate behavior?

Tennessee's Voluntary Pre-K – Participation in the TN VPK program is voluntary. Parents can withdraw their child at any time. The TN VPK programs cannot dismiss a child due to inappropriate behavior without submitting documentation of the attempted behavioral interventions to the TN Department of Education, Office of Early Learning. Children with Individual Education Plans (IEP's), being served by the TN VPK may not be dismissed, however, the IEP Team may convene to discuss a change to provide a more appropriate program or services.

Head Start - Parents may withdraw a Head Start child at any time. Local programs may only dismiss children under dire circumstances which are documented and monitored.

Special Education – Participation in special education services is voluntary, parents may withdraw their children at any time. School systems may not dismiss children but an IEP team can convene to discuss a change to provide a more appropriate program or services . Any suspensions or expulsions of preschool children with disabilities in special education programs must follow IDEA regulations.

17. Does a child need to be potty trained to be enrolled in a preschool program?

Although local programs may have entrance requirements suggesting that children must be potty trained to be enrolled in a program, children may not be denied enrollment if they are not potty trained due to a disability. Tennessee's Voluntary Pre-K Program does not require children to be potty trained prior to entrance. It is important for all involved to work together to provide an appropriate area that provides privacy for the child being changed and to maintain appropriate adult child ratios during the diapering process. Staff should be trained regarding Universal Precautions to protect them and the child from infection and disease associated with improper changing and disposal of diapers.